

Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 7 October 2016

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an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 24 November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/W/16/3149918

Mere Court Hotel and Conference Centre, Warrington Road, Mere, Cheshire East WA16 0RW

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Ailantus Hotels against the decision of Cheshire East Council.
 - The application Ref 15/3506M, dated 30 July 2015, was refused by notice dated 10 December 2015.
 - The development proposed is 24 no. bedroom purpose built ancillary accommodation and internal remodelling of existing coach house.
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Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/Y/16/3149919

Mere Court Hotel and Conference Centre, Warrington Road, Mere, Cheshire East WA16 0RW

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Ailantus Hotels against the decision of Cheshire East Council.
 - The application Ref 15/3507M, dated 30 July 2015, was refused by notice dated 10 December 2015.
 - The works proposed are 24 no. bedroom purpose built ancillary accommodation and internal remodelling of existing coach house.
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Decision

Appeal Ref: APP/R0660/W/16/3149918

1. The appeal is dismissed in so far as it relates to the 24 no. bedroom purpose built ancillary accommodation and allowed in so far as it relates to internal remodelling of lodge and internal remodelling and extension of coach house. Planning permission is granted for internal remodelling of lodge and internal remodelling and extension of coach house at Mere Court Hotel and Conference Centre, Warrington Road, Mere, Cheshire East in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 15/3506M, dated 30 July 2015, subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall begin no later than three years from the date of this decision.
2. The development shall be carried out in accordance with approved drawing nos. 5973/PS-02 and 5973/F-01.

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2. The appeal is allowed and listed building consent is granted for internal remodelling of lodge and internal remodelling and extension of coach house at

Mere Court Hotel and Conference Centre, Warrington Road, Mere, Cheshire East in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 15/3507M, dated 30 July 2015, subject to the following conditions:

1. The works hereby authorised shall begin no later than three years from the date of this decision.
2. The works shall be carried out in accordance with approved drawing nos. 5973/PS-02 and 5973/F-01.

The development site and its location

3. Mere Court Hotel and Conference Centre is a roughly square flat site of about one hectare on the north-east side of Warrington Road, part of the A50. The principal building on the site, the main hotel building, is close to its north corner whilst secondary buildings, a coach house and lodge, are close to the entrance at the west corner of the site. The coach house is a conference centre and the lodge is living accommodation. The south-eastern half of the site and an area between the principal and secondary buildings are landscaped grounds.
4. The hotel building, which was built as a house in 1903 in the Arts and Crafts Style, is a Grade II listed building. The lodge and coach house are listed by virtue of being located within the curtilage of the hotel. The site is in the Green Belt.

Procedural matter

5. The description of the development is the same in the planning application and in the application for listed building consent. Neither description includes proposed works to the lodge that include minor internal remodelling, whilst the described 'internal remodelling of existing coach house' includes an extension of about eight square metres. Furthermore, listed building consent is not required for the principal element of the development, a detached building of 24 bedrooms which would be located to the south-east of the hotel. The application for listed building consent will therefore be considered on the basis that it is for 'internal remodelling of lodge and internal remodelling and extension of coach house' and the planning application on the basis that it is for '24 no. bedroom purpose built ancillary accommodation, internal remodelling of lodge and internal remodelling and extension of coach house'.

Reasons

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6. The Council has not raised any significant concerns regarding the proposed works to the lodge and the coach house. The proposed extension to the coach house, given its limited size, would not be a disproportionate addition to the existing building and would not therefore be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The works are minor, would not cause any harm to the Green Belt, and would not cause any harm to any other matters of acknowledged importance.
7. The main issues are; first, whether the proposed detached building of 24 bedrooms is inappropriate development in the Green Belt; second, the effect of the proposed building on the openness and landscape of the Green Belt; third, the effect of the proposed building on the setting of the listed building; and fourth, whether there are material considerations that clearly outweigh the harm caused to justify a conclusion that very special circumstances exist in this case.

The first issue – inappropriate development

8. Paragraph 89 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it is for one of several exceptions. The Appellant does not claim that the proposed building falls within one of the exceptions and it would therefore be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Paragraph 87 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The proposed development conflicts with saved policy GC1 of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan (MBLP).

The second issue – openness and landscape of the Green Belt

9. The proposed building would be about 35 metres long, 16 metres wide and 8.5 metres high. Given its substantial physical size the building would have a significant effect on the openness of the Green Belt. Paragraph 79 of the NPPF states that an essential characteristic of Green Belts is their openness.

10. The proposed building would be largely screened in views across the landscape by trees on the site though the screening would be less effective in winter months. In this period of the year the building would be glimpsed from the A50 particularly by drivers and passengers in vehicles approaching the site from the south-east. The main hotel building, given its position on the site in particular, is not visible in these views and the proposed building would be, in this regard, a remote addition to development in this countryside area. The proposed building incorporates some of the design features of the main hotel building and it would not be unattractive. However, it would be a substantial and visually remote building in the countryside and would have a negative effect on the landscape character of the Green Belt.

11. The proposed building on the site would have a significant effect on the openness of the Green Belt and would have a negative effect on the character of the landscape. The proposed development conflicts with saved MBLP policy DC1.

The third issue – setting of the listed building

12. The two storey main hotel building is constructed in red brick and rendered brick under a tile roof. It has many Arts and Crafts design features such as tile clad projecting gables, canted bay and bow windows, and distinctive chimneys. The building also has distinctive steep pitched roofs of about 50 degrees. The proposed two storey building would be set apart from the existing main hotel building by about 65 metres and would be located in a clearing in the partially wooded site. There is, furthermore, a tree belt between the existing and proposed buildings. However, it is inevitable that the two buildings would be glimpsed together in some views within the site, particularly from the landscaped area alongside the north-east boundary of the site and to the south-east of a large pond close to the main hotel building.

13. The proposed building, as previously mentioned, incorporates some of the design features of the main hotel building but differs from it in one significant respect. The building would have a relatively shallow pitched roof of 32 degrees. It would, furthermore, have a long and horizontal profile in contrast to the high and vertical profile of the hotel building. The building would be, otherwise, relatively plain though it would be adorned with over-fussy and incongruous Juliette balconies to first floor windows on both principal elevations. The proposed building

would not be, in design terms, respectful to the existing main hotel building and would not, alternatively, have its own distinctive identity. Consequently, the proposed building would have a negative effect on the setting of the listed building and would thus conflict with saved MBLP policy BE2. The harm to the significance of the heritage asset, however, would be limited and less than substantial. In these circumstances, paragraph 134 of the NPPF states that the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

The fourth issue – very special circumstances

14. Paragraph 88 of the NPPF states that “Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations”.

15. The Appellants maintain that the hotel business is constrained by insufficient bedrooms resulting in an inability to host more than one wedding or conference event at a time. Consequently, it is claimed that the hotel business is losing significant potential revenue. The proposed building, it is claimed, would address the lack of sufficient bedrooms, would enable the hotel to host two events at a time, would require the employment of additional staff, would increase the availability of tourist accommodation, and would bring investment to the local area. The proposed development would clearly be of financial benefit to the hotel business and would increase employment, amongst other things, but these factors are not exceptional or unique to the site and could be applied to any significant development. Neither these factors, nor any others mentioned in support of the appeal, either individually or collectively, outweigh the harm that would be caused.

Conclusion

16. The proposed building would undermine the openness of the Green Belt and would have a negative effect on the character of the landscape and the setting of the listed building on the site. In addition, and most importantly, the proposed building is inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The benefits to the hotel business are not public benefits and do not outweigh the less than substantial harm that would be caused by the proposed building to the setting of the listed building. Overall, the harm that would be caused, as a matter of planning judgement and with regard to the proposed building, is not clearly outweighed by other considerations and very special circumstances therefore do not exist. Planning permission for the proposed building has therefore been withheld.

17. The internal remodelling of the lodge and the internal remodelling and extension of the coach house are not contentious and planning permission has thus been granted for internal remodelling of lodge and internal remodelling and extension of coach house at Mere Court Hotel and Conference Centre, Warrington Road, Mere, Cheshire East. The works are minor and can be achieved without any cause for concern for, for instance, the amenities of the area or highway safety. Consequently, only the standard time limit condition and a condition requiring the development to be carried out in accordance with approved plans, which is in the interests of proper planning, are necessary and have been imposed.

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18. The internal remodelling of the lodge and the internal remodelling and extension of the coach house are not contentious and would not adversely affect the architectural or historic interest of either building. Listed building consent has

thus been granted for internal remodelling of lodge and internal remodelling and extension of coach house at Mere Court Hotel and Conference Centre, Warrington Road, Mere, Cheshire East. The works are minor and can be achieved without any cause for concern for, for instance, the amenities of the area or highway safety. Consequently, only the standard time limit condition and a condition requiring the works to be carried out in accordance with approved plans, which is in the interests of proper planning, are necessary and have been imposed.

John Braithwaite

Inspector